

ASSESSMENT AND FEEDBACK TOOLKIT

ASSESSMENT DESIGN (STAGE 2 OF THE CU ASSESSMENT JOURNEY)

ASSESSMENT AT MASTERS LEVEL

“More than 80% of programmes encountered in this study were directly aligned to professional practice requirements, or were directly related to employment. Many of the students on these programmes were undertaking advanced study for potential career advancement or employment-related requirements.” Brown, S (2015:174)

INTRODUCTION

To set the scene, we revisit here the requirements for Masters level learning and the UK Quality Code for Higher Education.

MASTERS LEVEL LEARNING AND THE UK QUALITY CODE FOR HE

Typically, holders of the qualification will be able to:

- Deal with complex issues both systematically and creatively, make sound judgments in the absence of complete data, and communicate their conclusions clearly to specialist and non-specialist audiences
- Demonstrate self-direction and originality in tackling and solving problems, and act autonomously in planning and implementing tasks at a professional or equivalent level
- Continue to advance their knowledge and understanding, and to develop new skills to a high level
- Develop the qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring
 - The exercise of initiative and personal responsibility
 - Decision making in complex and unpredictable situations
 - The independent learning ability required for continuing professional development

Source: *UK Quality Code for HE (See page 28)*

Available: <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Documents/qualifications-frameworks.pdf>

TYPES OF MASTERS AWARDS (AS PER QAA)

Mainly 3 types of Masters awards are available, these include:

- Research
- Specialised or advanced study
- Professional practice

HOW DO WE PUT THIS INTO PRACTICE?

KEY QUESTIONS: Course teams should consider the following questions:

- Is your course professionally orientated or vocational?
- If so, how authentic is your assessment practices?
- What is your course Unique Selling Point (USP)? And what is the USP in your course assessment practices?

CONSIDERATIONS FOR DESIGNING ASSESSMENT

Brown (2011) and Bloxham (n.d) proposed the considerations that should be applicable at **Masters level assessment**. These considerations state:

- Tasks should be challenging, demanding higher order learning and integration of knowledge learned in both the university and other contexts;
- Learning and assessment should be integrated, assessment should not come at the end of learning but should be part of the learning process;
- Students are involved in self-assessment and reflection on their learning, they are involved in judging performance;
- Assessment should encourage metacognition, promoting thinking about the learning process not just the learning outcomes;
- Assessment should have a formative function, providing 'feedforward' for future learning which can be acted upon. There is opportunity and a safe context for students to expose problems with their study and get help; there should be an opportunity for dialogue about students' work;
- Assessment expectations should be made visible to students as far as possible;
- Tasks should involve the active engagement of students developing the capacity to find things out for themselves and learn independently;
- Tasks should be authentic, worthwhile, relevant and offering students some level of control over their work;
- Tasks are fit for purpose and align with important learning outcomes;
- Assessment should be used to evaluate teaching as well as student learning.

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN UG AND PG ASSESSMENT?

- 'MASTERY?' - critical thinking but what does this mean?
- Level of critical analysis, the ability to utilise different resources to underpin the students' arguments
- Masters students are expected to identify problems and look for solutions in their practice
- Application and development of students own theoretical ideas
- More independent work and therefore we can set more challenging tasks, we can be less prescriptive in a way, about what they have to do
- Marking criteria can make the difference

ASSESSMENT FOR, AS AND OF LEARNING

Bloxham (n.d) tend to categorise **assessment for and as learning** to have certain characteristics:

Assessment for learning is:

- to promote effective learning;
- formative and diagnostic;
- steering students' approach to studying;
- giving the tutor useful information to inform changes in teaching strategies.

Assessment as learning is:

- to achieve an understanding of standards;
- to learn how to make judgments;

- to be able to use criteria;
- to be able to tell when you really understand something.

Both “assessment as” and “assessment for” learning can be immediate, regular, in-class, online and involve students in their own assessment. It can use peer assessment and in general assessment as/for learning can be quick, cheap and involving low stakes.

Assessment of learning for accreditation on the other hand is more formal feedback, requires second marking, moderation, external examiner involvement, Assessment boards etc. and thus known to be slow, costly and involving high stakes.

ASSESSMENT EXAMPLES

Find here a summary of some innovative assessment practices across the globe. The collection was put together for a SRHE presentation by Sally Brown, 2011.

Brown, S. (2011) SRHE Presentation: Innovative assessment at Masters Level, SRHE: 6 October 2011. Available: https://www.srhe.ac.uk/downloads/events/37_PIN-dl-061011-b.pdf

Bedfordshire University - MSc in Marketing Communication

This course at Bedfordshire University places a strong focus on employability and enrolls a number of international students. Assessments include group tasks, but each student also has to produce an individual development portfolio including industry standard diagnostic tests as used in the advertising industry, promotional podcasts and personal reflections. Peer assessment is encouraged.

Cranfield University – Masters in Manufacturing Masters programmes.

Assessment includes a group assignment where students work in groups of 4-8, with live clients on authentic tasks. Outputs include project reports, posters, presentations, and other features e.g. Lego models of new factory layouts. Employer clients are involved in the assessment.

Massey University, New Zealand, allows students to negotiate their own assignment formats, including fiction, painting and reflection.

Central Queensland University (CQU), Australia - Masters in Management

Assessment includes very short synthesis assignments, case studies and peer evaluated presentations.

York University, UK, - Masters in Management

Have both UK and international students and use a variety of assignments including a mix of presentations (including group ones), open book exams and reflective writing tasks. This forms part of a diverse range of assignments which also include traditional essays, exams and dissertations.

University of Cumbria - Masters level programmes at the in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education.

Assignments involve a digitally-enhanced patchwork text approach using an e-portfolio to enable groups of four or five students to collectively work on and peer review ‘patches’ throughout the module. This alongside an individual reflection comprise the major assignment for the module within a supporting e-Portfolio.

Griffith University in Queensland Australia - Masters programmes Counselling

One of the modules on the Masters programme involves an intensive week where students come together to work on interpersonal skills using videoed role plays of Counsellors and clients, under the supervision of trained tutors. This is enhanced by the requirement to submit 500 word commentaries and personal reflections on the task.

Griffith University Queensland - Masters programme in Genetic Counselling

Uses a range of authentic assessments including coursework, multiple choice tests and practical assignments. Students are assessed individually on their ability to explore complex genetic problems building genetics family histories and working on authentic case studies. Role plays, skills tests, short written responses to ethics issues and reflective journals are also used.

James Cooke University, Queensland, Australia - Masters in Development Practice

Mainly international students and the assessment tasks are highly authentic and designed to be useful to the communities with whom they are working, for example, the presentation to the communities concerned of systems models, risk assessments and development plans, based on their own on-site research.

UNITEC Institute Technology, New Zealand - Masters of Business

Uses an incremental assessment approach and students have the opportunity to work on live assignments with local companies in which they immerse themselves in a consultancy experience, producing overview reports of real use to the companies concerned.

Worcester University - MSc module in the History of Computing

Assessment comprised the production of four position papers throughout the module replacing final summative assessment.

Central Queensland University (CQU), Australia – Masters in Occupational health and Safety

Assessment expects students to produce a safe activity design or a risk assessment in a live context. Obtaining ethics approval for the live task is often one of the more challenging elements of the project.

Central Queensland University (CQU), Australia – Masters in Railway Signalling and Communications and Operational Management

Assessment by portfolio and higher grades are given for original work that impacts on the local national or international railway context.

Central Queensland University (CQU), Australia - Masters in Management

Assessment includes very short synthesis assignments, case studies and peer evaluated presentations.

GIVING FEEDBACK AT MASTERS LEVEL

As Masters level courses tend to be delivered in a highly-compressed manner. In the UK, special care should be given with regards to the appropriate timing of assignments and how feedback for enhancement can be built in. Peer feedback is especially appropriate at Masters level, as the development of competencies in sensitive peer evaluation is a highly regarded as a postgraduate attribute. Where dissertations are used, frequent incremental feedback opportunities should be planned from to avoid disappointment and possible high failure rates. Even at Masters level, issues with regards to plagiarism are still very prominent and should be addressed in a timely manner.

“Feedback has little value unless it is timely, students pay attention to it, and act on it...”
Sue Bloxham (2012) The busy teacher educator’s guide to assessment.

Coventry University policy states clearly the turnaround times for giving feedback on summative assessment. At Post Graduate levels, students are to be given feedback on summative assessments within 2 weeks of submission date.

However, feedback should not be seen as only to be given on summative assessment but is equally important to provide formative feedback over the run of the course and in particular providing formative feedback on formative tasks. Increasingly it is seen as good academic practice to give formative feedback on summative assessment tasks prior to the submission date for the summative assessment.

INDIVIDUAL FEEDBACK ON SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENT TASKS SHOULD AS A MINIMUM CONSISTS OF:

- The final mark

- Feedback given against the assessment criteria of the particular assessment task
- An indication of what are strong areas in the assessment
- An indication of where there is room for improvement with appropriate suggestions (feed-forward)

Individual feedback may in most instances be brief due to class sizes and staff time, thus should always be accompanied by more extensive generic feedback to the group of students.

EXAMPLES OF DIFFERENT APPROACHES FOR GIVING FEEDBACK:

See here some examples but it is possible to adapt the examples to fit your particular needs and situation.

FEEDBACK SHEETS

Consider designing the feedback sheet containing the assessment criteria and make available to students at the launch of the assessment task. Consider how these feedback sheets will be completed by different markers, for example volume, depth and feed-forward comments to ensure consistency. Clearly communicate to students where they will be able to access the feedback sheets.

Another alternative is to when using assessment criteria, the assessment grid can be used to highlight the relevant (appropriate box) but replace the assessment criteria wording with a more personal feedback statement explaining your judgement of the assignment.

FACE-TO-FACE FEEDBACK

A very effective form of feedback if students can attend such a feedback session. One-to-one face-to-face feedback is probably the best but not feasible in larger classes. Also, consider how the feedback can be made available to students that could not attend the face to face feedback session.

GENERIC FEEDBACK

Effective form of feedback to groups of students and can be used to address common issues identified in marking the assessment. This could be put together by the team of markers where larger groups of students are involved. Make sure it links with the assessment criteria and offer suggestions for enhancement, thus feed-forward. This tends to be rather impersonal but is an effective format for giving formative feedback on summative assessments. However, students may find this a less threatening manner of getting feedback and good for face-saving expectations. Consider where the feedback can be accessed by the students (Moodle, recording, etc.) in addition to exploring this face-to-face in the classroom.

Generic feedback can be very useful if used in combination with individual feedback as this helps the student to get a better perspective as to their own abilities in comparison to the wider group.

When preparing generic feedback (oral or written), make sure it includes the following:

- State clearly (again) what you expected from the assignment.
- Summarise the elements of the assessment task that was generally well covered. May give examples but keep this anonymous.
- Summarise common issues / problems noted, could be related to academic writing skills, missing elements in the submission, etc. Best to keep examples anonymous.
- Give clear guidance of links to guidance to help improve future assessments. (feed-forward)

ANNOTATIONS IN SUBMISSIONS

Marking environments such as Turnitin allow for specific comments (annotations) on individual contributions. This can vary from generic comments (from a bank of comments) to very specific comments on an individual submission. Feedback in Turnitin can be written comments or recordings of feedback. Again, it is important that students know how and where to access these feedback comments.

AUDIO FILES AS FEEDBACK

Audio feedback can be used for generic group feedback as well as individual feedback to students. Some students will prefer to listen to feedback and some staff may find it less time consuming to record feedback rather than typing lengthy feedback sheets. Thus, audio feedback can be a time saver but one needs to consider how the feedback will be distributed and give guidance to students on accessing the audio files.

SCREEN-CASTING YOUR MARKING

As with audio feedback, this can be considered as another form of providing feedback by recording the screen while typing and giving oral feedback. This can be time consuming and feedback files can be very large – still a powerful experience for the student to see feedback in action.

AUTOMATED FEEDBACK

Typically used in automated assessment such as Moodle quizzes on other online tests with immediate feedback.

SEPARATING THE MARK FROM THE FEEDBACK

It is well known that students are more interested in the final mark than in the actual feedback comments. Consider releasing the feedback a week earlier than the final mark, ask students to comment and action plan based on the feedback, once submitted, the final mark can be released. There are examples of assessment where these reflections, action plans or prediction of the actual mark you have given them, can be awarded as bonus (e.g. 5% of the total mark).

Following this up with a classroom discussion can be a powerful experience to increase their understanding of assessment requirements.

ALLOCATING MARKS FOR ACTING ON PREVIOUS FEEDBACK

This is typically done when students have more than one assessment on a module and they are expected to reflect on how the feedback on the first assessment was taken into consideration of the second assessment task. A bonus (5%) should be given for the quality of this reflection and showing examples in the assessment of where previous feedback was useful for the second assessment task.

REFERENCES AND SOME FURTHER READING TO CONSIDER

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